

OP-EDS

# TIME FOR LEVIATHAN REDUCTION ACTION

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*Mr. T pitied the fools in Reagan's White House, but the building could still use general inspection from court jesters. Public domain.*

Despite taking socialists to task for being leery of the president (Joe Biden) who **boasted** that he “beat the socialist,” Justin Vassallo may as well be wearing a red suit for the message he’s bringing reds.

After all, according to Vassallo’s “**The Left’s Foolish Attack on Bidenomics**” (Compact Magazine, December 5), socialists need not bother with nostalgia for Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* inspiring JFK and LBJ to launch the War on Poverty six decades ago, when they wield considerable influence on the federal economic policy of 2024.

Not only are their reservations about endorsing Joe Biden’s economic policies enough of a threat to his re-election to be worth warning against, but even measures seemingly “a ‘gift’ to capital in the form of various subsidies” have the potential to be “activated through public policy within the framework of market society” through what leftist historian Martin J. Sklar called a “socialist investment component.”

Vassallo finds it “ironic” that “the most militant leftist critiques of industrial policy echo the libertarian right’s complaint that it is but another iteration of ‘crony capitalism.’” Ironically, it was Sklar who helped fellow radical scholars realize that progressive interventions “were always limited to those that would allow corporate capitalism to function more efficiently,” as noted in the editorial comments by Blanche Wiesen Cook, Alice Kessler Harris and Ronald Radosh in their 1973 survey *Past Imperfect: Alternative Essays in American History*. Sklar was also included in *A New History of Leviathan: Essays on the Rise of the American Corporate State*, coedited by Radosh with free-market libertarian Murray N. Rothbard.

Rothbard and Radosh’s joint introduction notes that their respective goals of “removing the privileges of the large corporations and returning to laissez-faire” and “a decentralized socialist economy” showed the “major political and philosophical differences between the editors.” Yet they shared an “awareness that the nature of liberalism has been distorted to mask large corporate control over American politics is essential for interpreting our past development, and for understanding how the Leviathan Corporate State operates today.”

Vassallo gets it exactly backward: It was Sklar and comrades like Radosh who helped make libertarians less automatically in favor of big business, and leftists wary of assuming that state support is friendly to labor bargaining power and consumer safety. The “peculiar dissociation from the ideas and strategies that animated Bernie Sanders and European left populists” is, if anything, a sign of how much the current left has forgotten of what the New Left learned.

While deriding “Econ 101 certainties that haven’t determined actually existing capitalism since the Industrial Revolution, if they ever did,” Vassallo is arrogant enough to prescribe “what the American economy should be producing more of — and conversely, what it could use less of.” (A proposed “new synthesis” of John Maynard Keynes and Alexander Hamilton had already long been the norm in American political economy when Hamilton was a trivia question in a Got Milk? ad.) Such compulsory counsel is the equivalent of getting coal for Christmas, plus a bill for the coal.

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## PUBLICATION/CITATION HISTORY